

# China

# Famine Conditions

## Which I Have

## Just Seen

By

Bishop W. R. LAMBUTH  
Methodist Episcopal Church, South

The American Committee  
for

# CHINA FAMINE FUND

THOMAS W. LAMONT, *Chairman*

Bible House, New York



# **"CHINA FAMINE CONDITIONS WHICH I HAVE JUST SEEN"**

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Methodist Episcopal Church, South

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*The following statement was made by Bishop Lambuth in Garden City, Long Island, on January 19, 1921. Bishop Lambuth has just returned from his work in China. He had traveled in the area affected by famine. He speaks the Chinese language of that region and was able to make accurate first-hand observations.*

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The conditions which I found in a visit to the interior of Shantung and Chi-li, by mule cart, horseback and on foot, almost baffle description. I found east and west of the Grand Canal lands that were being sold for one-third of their value, say at seven or eight dollars per mow (a mow is a sixth of an acre), and that nearly all the animals had been sold. In one village eighty were in use prior to the famine; now only twenty were left and they were about to be slaughtered or sold. In another thirty ani-

mals and only three were left. Land was being sold or mortgaged. The people had pawned or sold their clothing in the face of the coming winter. They said they would rather freeze than starve, and consequently their clothing was being disposed of. I took a photograph or two in which boys were almost stripped of their clothing.

The area affected consists of about a hundred thousand square miles where some fifteen million people are facing starvation. A number of famines, of course, have occurred in the history of this section of the country. The most severe, perhaps, was in 1877 and 1878. It is said that eight million people perished at that time from hunger, disease and cold. The area now involved is greater, and it is probable that more people will perish, if relief is not promptly rendered.

My entering into the causes of the famine time will not permit. I will simply say that they have had both drought and flood in some sections of this area—four successive droughts in one section, a plague of locusts, and in another a flood in addition. A study of the physical geography of this area will show that the rain clouds pass from the sea, the rain being precipitated in the mountains near the sources of the Yellow River. The denudation of forests, which has gone on for several hundred years in North China, has prevented the entanglement of the clouds

and precipitation has taken place in the remote interior, and little or no rain falls here. There was some rain in September, and the farmers were enabled to plant wheat. They will, however, get only forty or fifty per cent. of the usual crop. The seed was furnished by the Government and largely distributed by the missionaries.

## FAMINE FOOD

As to the food itself, or what is being used for food. I found just six weeks ago that what they had would not last more than three or four weeks—that consisted of nubbins of corn with fifteen or twenty grains to a nubbin. These grains were not well formed and were watery. An ear which I have at home, grown just south of the Great Wall, pretty well north of the famine region, was about ten inches long and had several hundred grains of corn, well formed and solid.

In the famine area the ear is not the length of your index finger and has an average of only fifteen or twenty grains. The millet was empty, a mere husk with no head. The people were eating ground corn cobs, mixed with leaves of elm, poplar or ash trees, and the little berry that grows on the ash tree. Also, potato tops, where they could beg or steal them. These were soon disposed of. I found them eating thistles. I asked a farmer one day: "Why are you eating

this stuff?" It was being prepared by his wife. He replied: "There is no help for it." Then he added: "I couldn't get my animals, when I owned any animals, to eat the food I am putting into my own stomach, and that which is being eaten by my family." You well know the consequence.

The consequences, of course, would be, first, reduction of efficiency as far as work is concerned, followed by dysentery and ultimately death, either by starvation or disease.

## FUEL

Fuel, of course, is scarce. Their dependence there is not upon trees, but what they grow. The stalks of the kaoliang and millet constitute their fuel. But not having had stalks for two years, they are tearing down their houses and burning them or the kaoliang stalks used for the roofs of these buildings. In a few weeks these will be used up and they then face death from freezing as well as death from starvation.

## SOCIAL EFFECTS

In this particular village I am thinking of just now, I met a woman of seventy-two. "Where is your husband?" I queried. "He has gone out to beg." "How long will he be gone?" "Two or three weeks," was the answer. "Have you sons?" "Three. They have gone to beg or work." "If they cannot

get work or beg," I asked the village elder and Mr. Hineger, who was with me: "What are they going to do then?" "They will rob," was the reply. In some of the villages it is now dangerous to travel. Robbing is growing constantly, as I was informed by the missionaries of the London Missionary Society.

## RELIEF WORK

### Organizations

What about the organizations that have been effected? There are at least four that are notable. One is the International Famine Relief Association in Shanghai, consisting of a mixed committee of Chinese and foreigners, foreign money going through the hands of the foreigners and Chinese money through Chinese hands. I met with the Committee after going to the famine district and ascertained the facts, because there had been some question raised as to the distribution of the fund.

In Tsinan Fu there is a local organization of missionaries and Chinese. In Tientsin there is the International Famine Relief Association, of which Mr. Turner is secretary. In Peking there is another International Famine Relief Association consisting of both foreigners and Chinese, and the members of the Legations. Mr. C. R. Crane, United States Minister to Peking, is a member of

that Association. Then there is the Red Cross.

## **Employment**

The Red Cross is undertaking to build a road from Tehchow on the Pukow-Tientsin Railroad. Tehchow is a station of the Congregational Board. Dr. F. F. Tucker and his wife are in charge of two hospitals. He is the local agent of the Red Cross. The road is 67 miles long which they are building to Lingtsin on the Grand Canal. They are proposing to put 100 men to every li (there are about four li to the English mile) of that road. When I was there they thought they could take care of 30,000, not only the men employed but their wives and children. A little later they increased the estimate to about a hundred thousand, but that was out of 1,500,000 needy people in the six counties in which the Tehchow missionaries were at work.

The Red Cross is doing good work but it is limited in funds. About five hundred thousand dollars in gold has been sent from America, and in addition, some from Manila, and other points in local currency, amounting to nearly a million silver dollars.

## **Food Supply**

As to the food supply. This comes largely from Manchuria. These North China people are not accustomed to the use of rice.



They use kaoliang or millet. Both are cheaper than rice and they give a sense of distension. Beans are being shipped to Chefu on the coast of Shantung, and by rail kaoliang and millet from Manchuria. The military governor of the Province of Shantung made it possible for free transportation in his territory and that, in a measure, has been done in other sections.

## **Public Confidence**

As to confidence. The distribution which has been made of foreign money has been through these committees and by the missionaries. The Chinese themselves have said repeatedly and affirmed that they have absolute confidence in the integrity of the missionaries doing this work so that not a little, even of Chinese money, has gone through the hands of missionaries who are representing these organizations at the several points mentioned and other points in Honan and Shansi.

## **What Is To Be Done?**

The need is more money. "If we had the money we could take care of these people. We could buy foodstuffs, and we could have it transported either by cart, mule-back, or on the railroads.

"As to money, five dollars will save a life. I calculate now that five dollars in silver will save a life. That would be much less,

of course, in gold at this time (at present less than three dollars American money). What is to be done must be done within the next five months. Yes, within the next two or three months; otherwise millions will perish. We cannot wait. In the next place, we need men."

Men and women are needed for these districts for distribution and to care for the sick and diseased. I made a call to my own Mission and had twelve volunteers; two have gone into the famine area and others will go. The missionaries, not a few of them, have had experience in other famines, and they will make the wisest directors and will be more efficient in this sort of work if they can be spared. They ought to be spared, partly on account of these people who themselves are needing their direct ministry, and on account of the missionaries in these localities who are breaking down from the very heavy burdens coming upon them. They cannot cope with the needs.

## THE URGENCY

As to the urgency, I repeat: There are about 15,000,000 people face to face with starvation. If they are not succored they will perish from three causes. First, starvation. I talked with three women who were sitting on the kang (a combination of stove and bed). They showed the ravages of disease in their eyes. "Why do you sit

here?" "We are not able to get off; we are too weak." "What are you eating?" "You can see it in the pot boiling nearby," was the reply. I dipped up some of the stuff and tried it. I couldn't live a week on the stuff. I said, "How long can you live on such food as this?" The food was the leaves of trees and thistles and a thick chaff mixed with them. They replied, "Four or five weeks. Not much longer than that. We are sick now." They were not able to walk and that was true of many others.

One thousand refugees died in a single night in Kalgan from cold. They had pawned or sold their clothing and refugeed up that far. A cold spell came on, and the men, women, and children perished. After I visited these two areas, I went to Tientsin. I couldn't sleep on account of the groans of the men and women who were lying on the stone pavements of the City of Tientsin. They were covering themselves with anything they could get to protect themselves from the cold.

Then there are the diseases. Dr. Piell told me there had been cholera at that time because it had turned warm and the flies carried the poison. "But," said he, "It is rather typhus fever we are anticipating. The people have sold or killed their animals and we are not able to transport the sick to our hospital. Consequently our patients have dropped off thirty per cent. during the

last few weeks." "I do not know what will happen," he continued. They were trying to take care of the London Mission at that point, one hundred ten li west of Linching on the Grand Canal.

I asked, "How much money have you received, and how many can you take care of?"

"All told, we have room to take care of twelve thousand people," was his reply.

"What will become of the remaining eighty-two thousand of your one hundred thousand?" I asked, to which he replied: "They will perish."

"What policy have you adopted?"

"The policy we have adopted is the same as that of the Red Cross; namely, the taking of a certain number of villages and carrying them through the year. That is all we can do."

"What about the rest?"

"They will die. As there is no use to keep them alive for two months and then let them starve, we have had to select a few villages, and we are endeavoring to carry those people through until the end of the season.

The urgency, therefore, is very great. I can hardly help you to realize how great it is. I sat in the railroad car and looked out of my window at a point between Tehchow and Tientsin, and someone threw a sandwich out of the diner onto the other track. There

were two women who sprang upon the track—it was a double track road,—and as they struggled for the sandwich, a guard who sat there to protect the tracks ran to these two women and separated them and threatened to strike them in order that they might get off the track. A dog sprang in and ate the sandwich.

I saw a dog in a village trying to eat a piece of oilcloth. He did his best to chew it up and swallow it, but he was so weak that he could hardly stand up.

In the villages to the east of where I saw this, I found there were no children—I mean no babies—none under one year of age. I asked: “Where are the children?”

“Gone,” was the reply.

“Given them away?” I queried.

The reply came back: “We have no one to give them to. Who can feed them? We have no one to sell them to. Who would buy them?” Why, children are being bought in Shanghai at a dollar apiece. The mother continued: “Rather than see our children starve, we will throw them into the wells.” The wells as a result have become so polluted in some sections, the American Consul told me at Tsinanfu, that the water could not be used.

The month of March probably will be the crucial month. There is no time to be lost because these fifteen million people, by

March, if they do not have more food than they are getting now, will at that time have become so weakened by lack of food that they will perish either from starvation, disease or cold. It is a fact that in the last famine they ate the cotton in their clothing (they wear cotton padded jackets, you know) to satisfy their hunger.

These are no exaggerated statements. I have seen the tragedy and looked it right in the eye. The missionaries there are feeling it very acutely, and urging that help be given—adequate help—at once.

I would reiterate that you may have absolute confidence in the committees at work because they have for their larger membership, missionaries in each case, whether it be Shanghai, Tientsin, or in Peking. Money sent and distributed through the committees which have been mentioned, will surely reach its objective.

I am sure that the facts, rather than any further words in the matter of appeal, will put before you the urgency of the case.

No time must be lost in meeting this demand, and whatever funds can be secured should be cabled, it seems to me, to one or the other of the committees which have been mentioned.





